

## NEWS

# 'Some starving' in North Korea as COVID constrains China trade, say UN experts

"Widespread food shortages" prevail in North Korea, say United Nations experts, compounded by a sharp dip in trade with friendly neighbor China owing to the coronavirus. One official urged a rethink on sanctions.



"Widespread food insecurity" in North Korea has prompted the UN's special rapporteur to urged the UN Security Council to "reconsider sanctions" imposed over Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programs.

Tomas Ojea Quintana told the council a 5-month border closure with China and North Korea's internal coronavirus pandemic strictures had worsened nutrition to an "alarming" level.

## Harming children, expectant mothers

Some 10 million North Koreans or 40% of its population faced malnutrition, spokeswoman for the UN World Food Program (WFP) Elisabeth Byrs told the media at a separate news briefing in Geneva.

"Long-term damage to the health and development of children as well as pregnant and nursing mothers, was evident, Byrs said.

Quintana said the pandemic had resulted in "devastating economic hardship" with a reported 60% fall in the North's China trade since last November.

Officially, North Korea has not recorded a single case of coronavirus, despite its rather porous border to China, where the virus is believed to have originated. The government's claims have met with considerable skepticism, however.

In large North Korean cities, homelessness had risen and prices for medicines had skyrocketed. Vaccine stocks and other aid had been "stranded" at the border, Quintana said — urging the North to allow all humanitarian aid to be delivered "without restrictions."

In the mid-1990s a famine across North Korea is believed to have killed between 250,000 and 3 million people; reliable data from the reclusive state does not exist.

Quintana also warned that [longstanding international sanctions](#) targeting the pariah state were only exacerbating the issue.

"In a context where the pandemic is bringing drastic economic hardship to DPRK [the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, North Korea's formal name], I encourage the UN Security Council to reconsider sanctions, in light of the impact on the livelihoods of people and the government's capacity to respond."

## Pyongyang cuts communications

In a parallel development Tuesday, the North's state news outlet, the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), [said the nation was cutting off all communications channels with US-allied South Korea](#).

KCNA accused Seoul of failing to revive lucrative inter-Korean economic projects and "dodging responsibility" to stop activists from floating anti-Pyongyang leaflets across the border.

For years, activists, including defectors living in the South, have floated huge balloons into North Korea carrying leaflets criticising its leader Kim Jong un.

Since a second summit in early 2019 between Kim and US President Donald Trump,. North Korea has increasingly cold-shouldered South Korea's President Moon Jae-in.

North Korea said the decision to sever links was made by Kim's sister, Kim Yo Jong, and former hardline military intelligence chief Kim Yong Chol.

ipj/msh (Reuters, AP)

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South Korea has blamed North Korea for starting cross-border shooting. It follows a reappearance of Kim Jong Un after a long absence and rumors of his demise. (03.05.2020)

### South Korean FM on the coronavirus: 'We have to live with this risk'

In an exclusive interview with DW's Conflict Zone, Kang Kyung-wha discussed her country's much-lauded handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. But has its technology-led response come at the expense of privacy? (13.05.2020)

## AUDIOS AND VIDEOS ON THE TOPIC

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